

On Tuesday, I hosted a broadband roundtable in Warsaw, to bring together broadband expansion stakeholders in the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula. We had a great group of participants including Ellen Matthews Davis from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development office, representatives from the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula Planning Districts, telecommunications companies, private citizens, and representatives from NeckTech, which on that day officially became the Northern Neck Broadband Authority.

From my service on the Westmoreland County Board of Supervisors to the General Assembly, where I served on Governor Kaine's Broadband Roundtable, I have been involved in this issue for several years now. Currently, many citizens throughout the First District are stuck with 1990's dial-up technology. The deployment of broadband in underserved and un-served areas is crucial to economic development, job creation, education and quality of life.

Since arriving in Congress, I've supported localities and organizations in the First District in their efforts to secure federal funding through both the annual federal appropriations process as well as through the broadband grant application process. We have many important projects waiting for their chance at funding here in the First Congressional District, including the VA Telecommunications Broadband Network and other initiatives promoted by the Planning District Commissions and organizations such as the Northern Neck Broadband Authority and the Center for Innovative Technology.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), or stimulus, has provided a total of \$7.2 billion, for broadband grants, loans, and loan/grant combinations. The stimulus also requires establishment of a National Broadband Plan slated to be released this month. While I did oppose the ARRA due to its increase in deficit spending, I want to be clear that I support growth-oriented incentives that encourage economic activity and job creation such as broadband expansion and infrastructure spending. These sorts of projects are ones which would have a real and lasting impact on the economy.

Right now, localities in the First District are applying for grant funding to continue the expansion of broadband access across the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula. They have been making real progress, and I am working with them to ensure they have all the tools they need to submit a successful application. However, there is still much work to be done. Providing broadband access to every citizen is a real and attainable goal, and I'm committed to seeing it become a reality.

Congressman Rob Wittman represents the First District of Virginia. He was elected to his first full term in November 2008 and serves on the Natural Resources Committee and the Armed Services Committee where he is the Ranking Member of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee.